

The Hitch Hiker's Guide to LCA

An orientation in LCA methodology and application

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Having been a hitch hiker myself as a student, I wondered what this way of travelling might have to do with Life Cycle Assessment? The explanation is given at pp. 7 and 8 of this hilarious book: the title is a reference to a book by Douglas Adams¹ and more specifically to the frustrating answer given by a supercomputer called 'Deep Thought'² to a question relating to the last secret of the universe: '42'. This meanwhile became popular as '42 method'. The book tries the contrary: to give a down-to-earth textbook of LCA as it is – or at least should be – used by most practitioners. Modern theory and latest developments of LCA are not ignored, but the bulk of the book presents LCA in a form that can be used by well-trained students, researchers and practitioners in industry and consultancy.

In some way it is astonishing that, 15 years after the birth of modern LCA, such a book (in English) has not been written before. There are several excellent monographs on the market, but no genuine textbook. This new textbook fills the gap. It has 13 chapters (organized in three parts: Introduction to LCA, 50 pp.; LCA methodology, 160 pp; LCA

applications, 110 pp.) and additionally exercises (110 pp.), appendices (general inventory data, characterisation indicators and weighting indices), Glossary, Index (a total of 543 pp.).

Since I assume (and strongly suggest) that most readers not yet owing this book will order and read it, I am not going to describe it in detail. Such a description could not reproduce the spirit of the book which I described above as 'hilarious'. It is the style, the lucid analysis of the method, the focus on feasible and actually used methods and the didactic skill of the exercises, which make this book unique.

As one who witnessed the early time of 'proto-LCAs' [1], I am especially pleased that this phase is correctly described, including the scientific portrait of the Swedish pioneer Gustav Sundström.

Since my main professional occupation is now the critical review of LCAs and related studies, I read chapter 7 ('Critical review of LCA') especially carefully. It provides the essence of this work, refers to the origin and the necessity, the basis in ISO 14040, and gives guidance how to perform a critical review.

Chapters 9 to 13 are devoted to LCA applications. I only cite the titles of these chapters to show the broad scope of this part 3: LCA and product development (9); Green marketing and LCA (10); LCA for production processes (11); LCA and waste management (12) and Organising LCA activities in a company (13).

[1] Klöpffer W (2006): The Role of SETAC in the Development of LCA. Int J LCA 11 (3), May edition

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¹ Douglas Adams: The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

² Honny soit qui mal y pense